

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the gentleman from Texas is proud of this legislation, but I want to tell him, I am ashamed of this legislation, and I am ashamed of what we are about to do; and I hope we do not do it.

Secondly, he said his constituents are going to be helped. They are not going to be helped; they are going to be hurt. When he says this is a good bill, it is not a good bill; it is a bad bill. My constituents are calling, the gentleman from New York (Mr. *Range*) said his constituents are calling, and they are calling me because they are scared to death about what you are going to do, because they think that Medicare is going to die, to disappear and that they are not going to get any kind of decent prescription drug benefit.

Let me tell my colleagues why they are right. There is no question that you are not going to get any kind of drug benefit under this bill unless you go private. You have to join an HMO. If you do not join an HMO and lose your choice of doctor or your choice of hospital, then you are not going to get the drug benefit. They are scared, because they do not want to do that. They do not want to have to trade and lose their doctor in order to get some kind of drug benefit.

Secondly, they are upset because there is no benefit here. There is nothing here for them to benefit from. They are going to have to pay more out, shell more out of their pocket than they are going to get back in terms of a prescription drug benefit. If we look at what this bill does, first of all, we do not know what the premium is going to be. You might have a premium of \$75, \$85 month. You have to pay a deductible of \$275 a month. After you pay out \$2,200, for the next \$3,000 or so, you get no benefit at all, no drug benefit. You have to pay 100 percent out-of-pocket while you continue to pay probably a very high premium.

So they figure, I am going to lose my choice of doctor. I may lose my choice of hospital. And at the same time, I am not getting any benefit because of this doughnut hole and what you are causing me to pay out.

Then they say, they are expecting there is going to be some kind of controls on the price of prescription drugs, but you have a clause in the bill that says that we cannot even negotiate price. So the costs of prescription drugs will continue to rise, as all of these other terrible things are happening.

Then they say, my constituents say to me, Congressman, is it true that this bill does not even take effect until 2006 with the drug benefit? The answer is yes. That is what the bill says. Read the bill: 2006 before the drug benefit kicks in. You know what my constituents say? That is a joke. What kind of a joke is this? You are going to have some election in 2004 and then you are all going to run for election and say what a great thing this is and this is not even going to kick in. They want a prescription drug benefit now. Why can it not start January 1 of 2004?

Lastly, the reason they are really scared is because of the privatization. I heard the gentleman from California (Mr. *Dreier*) say ``privatize" three times. That is what this is all about: privatizing, not just the prescription drug benefit, but Medicare as a whole. Because even though we are only going to have these demonstration programs in certain parts of the country, the bottom line is they are going to impact the whole country and ultimately, by the year 2010, you are going to force people to take a voucher, try to go out in the private sector and buy their Medicare as a whole, and if they cannot find it or they do not like what they are offering for that voucher, that set amount of money, then they are not going to be able to stay in traditional Medicare, fee-for-service Medicare.

Privatize Medicare, privatize the drug benefit, it does not even start until 2006, and you lose your doctor. That is why they are scared to death.